

FireFighter

The magazine of the Fire Brigades Union www.fbu.org.uk

June/July 2011

7/7
Coroner
praises
firefighters
See p16



STOP THEM FRAGMENTING THE SERVICE

Government fire service plans assessed
See p12





Matt Wrack

Conference prepares for fights to come

Our union's annual conference met in Southport in May. It was one of the most serious and sober conferences I can recall, as delegates debated the range of challenges we face. A number of retired FBU officials who were present commented to me that the scale of the attacks we are facing is unlike anything seen in recent history. In living memory we have never been under such a sustained onslaught on so many fronts.

The battles ahead

Conference debated the various attacks we face – on pay, on jobs and, above all, on pensions. It is clear there is huge anger at the way our service and those who work within it are being treated. The cuts agenda threatens to undermine the very basis of the UK fire and rescue service.

It will put our members and the public at greater risk. We agreed to develop our political campaigning against these horrendous cuts.

But we also debated the need for an alternative. Conference agreed a policy statement which outlined clearly why the government's analysis and agenda will not solve the economic problems facing working people in the UK. This is an important aspect of our campaigning to defend ourselves.

Pensions

Perhaps the most urgent debate was that on pensions. I know that everyone is

increasingly alarmed at what the government proposes to do to each of our pension schemes. Conference was again clear in its opposition and agreed to step up the campaign against the attacks. The union has asked the YouGov polling organisation to survey

members on pensions, which will be an important tool in discussions with government. Please ensure you participate – it only takes a couple of minutes via our website.

We have urged all branches to meet to discuss all the attacks we face, particularly

those on pensions. That is an essential part of the democratic process as we develop our campaign. But conference was absolutely clear. If the government will not budge, we must prepare for a serious fight – which would mean strike action. I urge every single branch to meet to discuss this and every single member to participate.

Union restructuring – and union organising

In such circumstances, some may ask why we have been undertaking a major overhaul of our structures. We make no apologies for this and I am sure members will be pleased that union officials are carefully considering everything we do with a view to identifying whether it can be done better and more efficiently. Some of the decisions already taken have been somewhat painful, but they are aimed – above all else – to provide greater assistance to our officials on the frontline. For example, since 2003 we have seen increased local bargaining on many issues (such as duty systems). This has placed added responsibilities on brigade officials of the FBU.

Our restructuring is attempting to provide additional support where these pressures fall hardest. So we will be creating new brigade organisers to develop campaigning local work. We hope that this will assist the current local officials and provide additional resources and support.



The union has asked the YouGov polling organisation to survey members on pensions. Please ensure you participate – it only takes a couple of minutes

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LETTERS

Branches should be represented on trades councils

I was introduced to the union in 1960 after joining the Somerset fire brigade. I had very little knowledge after 12 years in the Royal Navy, having joined as a boy seaman in 1947, and took no interest in politics. But I attended branch meetings and listened to George Beck, the branch secretary, and Ray Dunn, the brigade secretary. They soon got me interested in the union.

John Horner was general secretary of the union and its slogan was "A service for the sixties". This saw a change from firefighters just putting out fires to becoming more professional, playing more of a part in fire prevention work and studying the effect of various chemicals used in industry.

The union still had to be watchful of employers trying to take some retrograde steps against us. This is where my connections with the Labour Party came in handy as I had met various council members. The trades council was very interesting as it kept us up to date with other unions. We would help one another where we could, they would write on our behalf to local councillors and to members of parliament.

With the present government being run by a load of private school twits, the Fire Brigades Union has one of the biggest fights in its history: to protect jobs and conditions of service. It will need all the tools it can get.

I have just received my copy of *FireFighter* and can see the advantage of branches having representation on trades councils, as they will send letters to MPs and other influential people.

I have been a member of the union since 1960 and I am now an out of trade member. I am 79 and can't help the union as much as I would like, but I wish the FBU all the best. I know you will succeed in the present struggle.

Dick Bowgen

FBU takes the pensions fight to high court

Pensions

The Fire Brigades Union and other key public service unions have launched a high court challenge to block massive cuts in the value of public service pensions.

The union last month lodged an application for a judicial review of the government decision to use the consumer prices index (CPI) rather than the retail prices index (RPI) to uprate pensions. The switch was made by order in Parliament in March.

FBU general secretary Matt Wrack said:

"We believe the government actions are unfair and unlawful.

This is a vicious attack on existing and future pensioners that could cost them tens of thousands of pounds.

"We're being told to work a lot longer, pay a lot more and now get a lot less. Public sector pensioners don't feel 'we're all in it together'."

The immediate effect of the government's action was to lower the increase to public service pensions that would have taken place in

April from 4.6% under RPI to 3.1% under CPI.

The Hutton review of public service pensions estimated that the switch to CPI will cut pension entitlement for existing pensioners by around 15%. The amount will be higher for officers and managers currently paying into pension schemes. They would see the future value of their pensions slashed.

The application for judicial review says it was unlawful for the government to impose the switch in the way it did and for the reasons it set out. The application also refers to the fact that the government should have consulted on the change before it was implemented.

The FBU action is backed by the NASUWT teachers' union, the prison officer's association, the PCS civil service union and the Unite general union.

Matt Wrack said: "Pensioners are being forced to bear an unfair burden for the financial crisis caused by the banks. Public sector pensioners are being robbed of tens of thousands of pounds each while the City counts up its multi-billion pound profits and bonuses."

**HANDS OFF
OUR PENSIONS**



STEFANO CAGNONI/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

FBU pensions survey

The Fire Brigades Union has commissioned the independent polling organisation YouGov to survey members about the government's pensions plans.

The union wants to hear members' views on the changes and what they think

the union should do about them.

Go to the dedicated website – it only takes a few clicks.

All of the responses provided are strictly confidential and anonymous. YouGov is registered with the Information

Commissioner and abides by the Data Protection Act.

The survey will be open until Friday 17 June.

[www.yougov.co.uk/
fbu-pensionssurvey](http://www.yougov.co.uk/fbu-pensionssurvey)

Dan Giblin: The stakes have never been higher for trade unions

www.fbu.org.uk

Union and community join to defend service

Cambridgeshire

Firefighters, their families and the local community joined together last month in Cambridgeshire to organise an impressive campaign to defend the fire and rescue service.

The campaign, which saw weekend events throughout May across the county, was launched after Cambridgeshire fire and rescue service management sought to impose huge cuts.

Kevin Napier, FBU brigade secretary for Cambridgeshire, said: "Like many shire brigades, we work and serve our communities directly.

"The good folks of our towns and cities are hearing the message of the needless and savage cuts from people they recognise and trust. With a very loud voice they have indicated that they oppose them."

A plain language community website has been set up to explain the plans, so people can understand the reality.

Firefighters and their supporters have taken to the streets of Cambridge, Peterborough and the market town of Huntingdon, where management threatens to introduce the "day crewed plus" duty system.

"The feedback so far is unanimous opposition to the suggested cuts and rejection of any lesser fire service for the taxes people pay," said Kevin Napier.



Cambridgeshire firefighters campaign in the community

"It clearly demonstrates that the family involvement is proving a major success. It shows the public the intense pride firefighters have in providing this service to the residents of the county. This approach has also seen supportive press and media attention."

More information on the campaign website: www.savecambsfire.org.uk



SOUNDING OFF

How to get organised

FBU organiser Daniel Giblin

Everybody has their own reasons for becoming active in the FBU. But one of the main reasons members choose to take on an FBU role is to improve their own and their colleagues' lives both inside and outside the workplace. This means building the strength of the union at branch level in order to improve pay and conditions and health and safety and achieve equality for all.

For over 90 years the FBU has traditionally brought members together to stand shoulder to shoulder and these members have succeeded in protecting the fire service and its employees. Members should be justly proud of these achievements.

However, despite these successes, in the current climate, the stakes have never been higher for trade unions and all members have a duty and responsibility to assist in building the FBU where they work. Officials, reps and members have a duty to organise the unorganised and spread the message about the importance of being an FBU member.

To make this happen, we not only need firefighters to join the union. We need them to be active and organised as well. It is vital that all members, regardless of what duty system they work, see the FBU as something they want to become involved in.

Some of the things you can do to improve organising within the FBU.

- Encourage a colleague to join the FBU:
- Keep the noticeboard on your station up to date.
- Keep other members up to date with current FBU issues both locally and nationally.
- Assist your local officials with mapping exercises.
- Arrange a branch meeting.
- Become the FBU rep for your watch/station/workplace.
- Attend lobbies and demonstrations.

Organising is not simply about recruiting, it's about increasing membership activity as well. Where we are already strong we need to get stronger.

No plan B as AssetCo totters

London

AssetCo, the private company that owns London's fire appliances and equipment, saw its share price collapse last month. If the firm goes into administration, the FBU fears its assets could be handed over to the banks.

Ian Leahair, FBU executive council member

for London, said: "This is a privatisation scandal that could put lives at risk in London. AssetCo is teetering on the brink of financial collapse and may take down London's fire engines and key equipment with it.

"If it goes under, it is the company's creditors which have first call on the assets, not the fire service.

This scandalous situation is exposing fatal flaws with privatisation, particularly in key public services.

"It's a disgrace that London's emergency planning authority can't show what plans it has in place if this company goes under. Their silence and complacency on this issue is truly astonishing, they have no 'plan B' in place."

FBU conference 2011

President rallies union for coming fight to save service

Alan McLean

Alan McLean took the reins as president for the first time and rallied conference with a stirring speech, urging delegates to celebrate the union's past and prepare for the future.

He highlighted the attacks facing fire-fighters, describing them as "the men and women any infrastructure of a decent society requires".

McLean warned that government and employers "see us as a burden, they see us as a threat but, most of all, they see us as expendable. To combat these attacks, the only show in town is the Fire Brigades Union. We have proven, once again, that when we stand together we are a formidable force."

McLean pointed to the union's role in defeating the FiReControl project. "Without our voice articulating the flaws for all to hear, regionalisation would



Alan McLean: FBU the only show in town

have occurred. However, we knew that our victory would be short-lived, as more assaults from mergers in control are planned. Once more we need to hit the campaign trail."

He said the union had a "glorious" past and paid tribute to Mick Shaw and other past presidents. "The union is like a child," he said. "We never own it, we borrow its

custody and hope to pass it over to the next generation of officials. It is indeed a precious body and one which must be preserved."

Looking ahead to the week's debates, McLean urged delegates to help reorganise the union so it could continue fighting and campaigning on members' behalf for jobs, pay, pensions and against the cuts.

"Our members are every bit as aware of the problems in this service as anyone in this room," he warned delegates. "After all conference, they live it on a daily basis."

He paid tribute to members in London during the recent dispute. "They have been a credit to this union," he said.

McLean praised FBU officials Sian Griffiths and Kevin Hughes, victimised by management for their union activities defending members. "Take heed," he warned employers. "We will never stand idly by whilst you persecute our officials. We protect our own with every means at our disposal."



One minute silence



Conference in session

Everything we have fought for under attack

John McDonnell

The government is "dismantling the welfare state, brick by brick," Hayes and Harlington MP John McDonnell told the conference.

The Localism Bill currently going through parliament

meant an end to council housing, said McDonnell. And he accused health secretary Andrew Lansley of planning "the full privatisation of the National Health Service."

McDonnell, secretary of the FBU's parliamentary group, the union's "voice in parliament",

said that everything generations of workers had fought for was under attack.

"Our mission," he said, "is to protect our fire service, our members and our communities. We need to stand together in solidarity".

McDonnell confessed that

he supported the students who occupied Fortnum and Mason's in March, pointing out that UK Uncut had helped bring tax justice to the centre of the political agenda.

"The casualties were one chocolate rabbit. Well, there have to be sacrifices!" he said.



Conference votes

'Prepare for national action over pensions'

Pensions

A strike in the fire and rescue service over changes to firefighters' pension schemes came a step nearer as the FBU conference asked members to "prepare for national strike action".

General secretary Matt Wrack said the government wanted firefighters "working longer, paying more and getting less at the end of it". Ministers wanted firefighters to work until the age of 60. Wrack asked if the public "really wants firefighters of 60 and over coming out and trying to rescue people from buildings".

The successful resolution promised that the union is "committed to seeking

genuine dialogue and negotiations with government" and said that firefighters "will always be extremely reluctant to take any form of industrial action". But Wrack was not optimistic about the outcome, believing that "the only answer will be national strike action and co-ordinating that with colleagues in other unions".

Delegates rejected a call from London firefighters for an immediate strike ballot and a strike in August. FBU London organiser Ben Sprung said an immediate ballot would "ensure that we are committed to taking action". He was supported by Pauline Perry of Berkshire who said: "PCS have thrown down the gauntlet – can we not do the same?"

IN BRIEF

Driving through red lights

Kieran Davies from Essex moved a resolution about the increasing expectation by some fire and rescue service managers that employees should drive through red lights when proceeding to emergency calls and that the FBU's policy position should be reviewed.

Delegates were concerned that employers were hiding behind financial regulations to avoid providing legal representation to emergency vehicle drivers when an accident occurs and criminal proceedings follow.

Lee Moon from Bedfordshire reminded delegates of the significant demands and pressures placed on members driving emergency vehicles to 999 emergencies and emphasised that employers should provide and fully fund legal representation, because they asked, trained and expected drivers to drive through red lights. This was not a "get out of jail free" card, but an entitlement for drivers.

Conference agreed it was time for the executive council to review existing policy.

Condemnation for day crew plus

Conference passed an emergency resolution on the "day crew plus" duty system, criticising it as unprofessional, outdated and unfit for purpose.

Bob Walker spoke of letters sent to all wholifetime Devon and Somerset firefighters inviting "expressions of interest" from staff wishing to work a new duty system entitled "day crew plus".

Conference resolved that the executive council would consider the matter urgently, including a strategy of co-ordinated action.

Scottish fire service consultation

Conference resolved to fight every cut and every job loss, including job losses from forced relocation of posts, in Scotland.

The resolution came after a Scottish government consultation on the future of the fire and rescue service in the country, with a view to creating a single service.

Andy Fulton from Lothian and Borders said: "This exercise by the Scottish government is about cuts to fire service budgets in Scotland. It will result in threats to our members' jobs, particularly firefighters on the retained duty system, officers and control staff."

Other delegates emphasised there was no appetite in Wales for a single service.



National pay strike nearer

Pay

A national fire service strike over pay came a little closer after FBU conference voted for a campaign "which, if necessary, should culminate in a ballot for industrial action up to and including strike action".

General secretary Matt Wrack (left) told delegates that there had been no pay offer in 2010 or 2011. The union had submitted a pay claim in 2010 which did no more than keep pace with inflation as measured by the retail price index (RPI). It had not accepted

the fact that no pay rise had been offered in 2010.

"If we are talking about taking on our employer we are talking about national strike action," he said. "A fight on pay will come when this union and its members are ready for it. A strike in the fire service is a very serious step to take and no one does it lightly."

Firefighters would not allow their pay to be steadily eroded, he said. "In the 1970s it was hard to recruit firefighters because this was a low-paid industry. We cannot and will not allow it to go back to being a low-paid industry."

IN BRIEF

Injury sustained on duty

Conference passed a resolution from the FBU's national retained committee on injuries sustained on duty. Paul Brownhill argued that the pro-rata arrangement of injury benefit was unfair. Conference asked the executive council to negotiate a settlement agreed through the National Joint Council for compensation in relation to loss of earnings in retained members' primary employment.

Canvassing in union elections

FBU conference agreed that the executive council should set up a working party on the possibility of introducing regulated canvassing for elections



within the FBU rule book. Joe MacVeigh (left) from London said existing rules were outdated in the light of new technologies. The

executive council will make recommendations with any possible changes brought to the next conference.

Defence of health and safety

Conference condemned the government's dilution of safe working practices by fire and rescue services, driven by Lord Young's report *Common Sense, Common Safety*. Tony Curry from Durham criticised the report and argued that safety was central to the union's campaigning role.

Conference instructed the executive council to investigate the threat to members' health and safety posed by the plans.

Defending equality

Conference registered the attack on equality by the new government and resolved to campaign to defend the gains made in recent years. Pat Carberry from the FBU's LGBT national committee moved a motion, originally on LGBT issues. It was amended by Carole Brown from the FBU's B&EMM committee to include all sections.

Conference recognised that, since the general election, the new fire minister had sent a clear message that equality in the fire service does not matter by scrapping the ten-year equality strategy.

On the fringe

London FBU hosted a debate on the strategy needed to stop the cuts. Speakers included Matt Wrack and representatives from the main anti-cuts umbrella groups. There was also a fringe meeting organised by Unite Against Fascism and a successful Palestinian fundraiser organised by FBU region 1.

Applause for FBU organiser of the year

Sarah Eratt

Sarah Eratt from South Yorkshire has won the first "Fire Brigades Union organiser of the year" award for her outstanding contribution to organising and recruitment.

The award, sponsored by the FBU's preferred insurance provider UIA, was announced at conference and will become an annual event.

There were several nominations and all had shown exceptional commitment to recruiting and organising of members during 2010-11.

Sean Starbuck, FBU national officer, explained why Sarah Eratt had won:

"Sarah Eratt works in control and became an active member of the FBU during one of the most hostile periods in recent years – the bitter local shifts dispute in 2009.

"Following the South Yorkshire dispute, she became very involved in fighting the



Sarah Eratt receives the first FBU organiser of the year award from national officer Sean Starbuck

FiReControl project by becoming an active member of the Yorkshire and Humberside control regional committee. She has recruited new FBU members and, as brigade membership secretary, completely updated local membership data through a membership mapping exercise.

"She has pioneered a very innovative and effective "FBU News Flash" bulletin facility, in an easy to read and understand format, telling members about meetings and forthcoming FBU events. The bulletin is now being adopted around the region.

"Sarah has made a huge contribution to 'organising' in her short time being active in the FBU and is a very deserving winner."

FBU plans for independence and strength

Reorganisation

Conference passed a wide-ranging executive council policy statement on the reorganisation of the union, to ensure that the FBU is ready to face the challenges ahead.

The central aim of the statement was to strengthen the structures of the FBU to build, protect and improve our capacity to campaign on behalf of FBU members on the key challenges we face in relation to jobs, pay, pensions and conditions of service.

General secretary

Matt Wrack argued that it is imperative that the FBU is sustainable and viable in the long-term as the independent and specialist fire and rescue service union. By improving mechanisms for budgeting and long-term planning and by ensuring that union structures are efficient and effective, this aim could be fulfilled.

To assist local campaigning, conference agreed to create a new post of brigade organiser. This will provide additional support to other local officials.

Challenges ahead

Control

Conference celebrated the union's vital role in defeating the FiReControl project, but warned that the threat to control staff remained. Tim Gerrard from the control section national committee thanked members for the seven-year campaign, but warned that control job cuts were already being threatened.

Conference demanded that there should be no compulsory redundancies and that all fire control employees currently on Grey Book conditions of service should remain so.

It further agreed to oppose the merger of any emergency fire control room and to mount an immediate campaign against such mergers, up to and including a ballot for industrial action.

Egyptian union leader speaks

Kamal Abbas

Kamal Abbas, a leader of the new Egyptian labour movement, spoke at the FBU's conference. The union was instrumental in organising his visit to the UK and proud to host the first meeting.

He received a standing ovation for his decades-long work for independent unions.

Abbas said: "Today you will discuss how to defend the rights of firefighters, those heroes who risk their lives as a price for doing their duty. To all of you I pay my regards and respects."

Abbas spent over a decade working in a steel mill, before organising the 1989 Helwan steelworkers' strike, which brought out 20,000 workers. The strike was repressed, but he used the skills learned in the plant to found the Centre for Trade Union and Workers' Services, an organisation advocating and fighting for workers' rights.

The centre helped Egyptian workers organise and their efforts ultimately weakened the Mubarak regime. When 60,000 workers came out on strike in support of their own demands and in solidarity with the protesters in Tahrir Square, the dictator was forced to step down.

Abbas added: "After the revolution, we moved towards forming more independent unions. We toured Egypt's industrial cities, to help and encourage workers to form independent unions, based on democracy, unions



Kamal Abbas: Building independent, democratic unions was our duty

dominated by workers' will and capable of defending their rights. And when we did this, we thought we were doing our duty."

He helped to found the Egyptian Federation for Independent Trade Unions in March this year, which is helping around one million workers organise new independent unions in Egypt.



Conference pictures:
Rob Bremner

Delegates set out alternative to cuts

Austerity

FBU conference faced head-on the massive assault on workers' living standards and resolved to raise a clear alternative to austerity.

General secretary Matt Wrack argued that firefighters and other public sector workers face perhaps the most serious assault since the 1930s.

He said that the government had provided "a little bit of socialism" for the bankers, when

they took over RBS, Lloyds and Northern Rock. But instead of turning these banks towards funding public services, they had gone back to big bonuses and were being readied for privatisation.

Conference agreed that the union should argue for progressive taxation, public ownership and an end to giveaways to privatisers like AssetCo to balance the books and build a more sustainable economy.

IN BRIEF

Opposition to privatisation

Conference condemned the disgraceful attempt by the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority to replace striking operational firefighters with strike breakers employed through AssetCo during last year's dispute.

Ben Sprung from London argued that, given the government's widespread privatisation plans, the executive council should set up a working party to research the issue throughout the UK fire and rescue service.

A report and recommendations would be presented to the next conference.

FBU membership

Conference instructed the executive council to study the feasibility of facilitating access to membership of the FBU for all employees of UK fire and rescue services.

Speakers argued that it was vital to organise and represent non-uniformed and other roles employers had created. A report will be presented to the next conference.

Tax justice

Conference called for the executive council to launch a major campaign for tax justice.

John McFadden from Strathclyde said the union should argue for progressive taxation applicable to all that provided a fair means of redistributing wealth and secured sustainable funding for high quality public services.

The campaign would illuminate corporate tax evasion and avoidance strategies, which permit multinational corporations and wealthy individuals to make huge profits yet pay little tax.

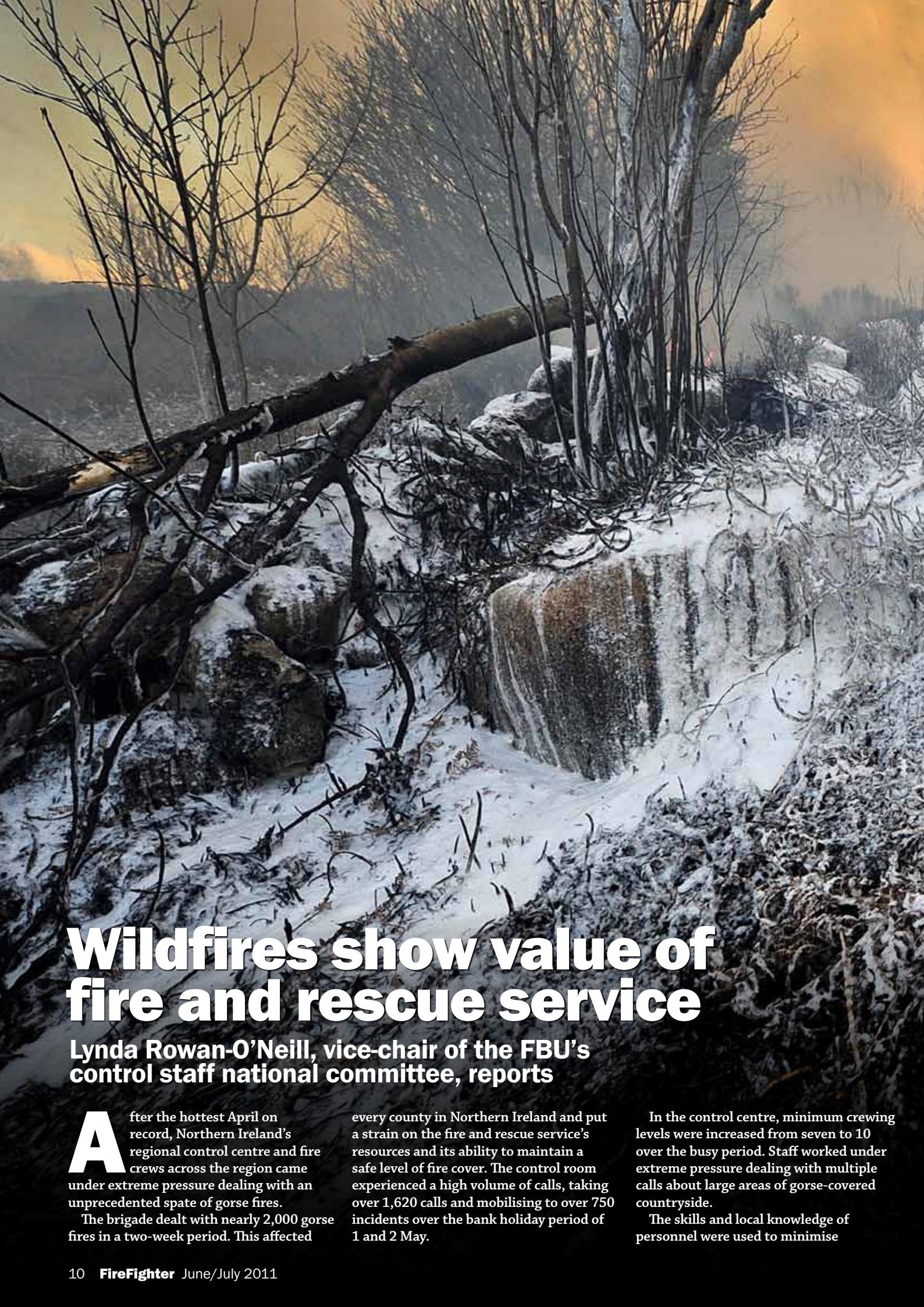
Conference agreed to support the campaign for a tax on all financial transactions, known as the Robin Hood Tax, and to support UK Uncut in exposing by non-violent direct action the tax avoidance strategies of big business.

Equality targets

Conference condemned the government's scrapping of centrally driven "equality targets" for under-represented groups in the fire and rescue service.

Sam Rye from the FBU's national women's committee argued that the removal of centrally driven targets had not been equality impact assessed and would "undoubtedly have a detrimental effect on women".

Conference called on the executive council to lobby the government to reinstate reflective targets and closely monitor the recruitment and retention of women firefighters in the UK fire and rescue service.



Wildfires show value of fire and rescue service

Lynda Rowan-O'Neill, vice-chair of the FBU's control staff national committee, reports

After the hottest April on record, Northern Ireland's regional control centre and fire crews across the region came under extreme pressure dealing with an unprecedented spate of gorse fires.

The brigade dealt with nearly 2,000 gorse fires in a two-week period. This affected

every county in Northern Ireland and put a strain on the fire and rescue service's resources and its ability to maintain a safe level of fire cover. The control room experienced a high volume of calls, taking over 1,620 calls and mobilising to over 750 incidents over the bank holiday period of 1 and 2 May.

In the control centre, minimum crewing levels were increased from seven to 10 over the busy period. Staff worked under extreme pressure dealing with multiple calls about large areas of gorse-covered countryside.

The skills and local knowledge of personnel were used to minimise



VIEW FROM THE AERIAL LADDER PLATFORM

Firefighters use foam to tackle a gorse fire on Flagstaff viewpoint, near Newry. Around 60 acres of gorse was alight.

mobilising to duplicate calls. With gorse fires covering vast areas and often encroaching on property, control staff had to deal reassuringly with callers who were extremely anxious but could not see a fire appliance or fire crew dealing with their particular circumstance.

At times the resource board in the

control room showed lights on for practically every station. The busy spell highlighted the commitment of the staff throughout the organisation and in controls the team work and dedication of all on duty made a highly stressful situation a rewarding one. However, we were glad when it started to rain.

With climate change, average temperatures will increase by 3% in the coming decades, together with more extreme weather events.

Our response to the gorse fires underlines once more the value of our fire and rescue service and why we need to fight to defend it.

W

here is the UK fire and rescue service going? In April the government began to set the direction it wants to go in – and the destination is not an attractive one.

The government responded to the *Fire Futures* reports on 12 April. This was its reaction to four fire and rescue service workstream reports, published in December 2010. The FBU took part in the consultation process and is critical of some aspects of the reports – in particular the further fragmentation of the service.

FBU assistant general secretary Andy Dark said: "The fire service is unique in that it provides a UK response. It is not 'one arm of local government'. Its role and duty is very different from purely local services, such as those provided by a borough or district council's libraries.

"The national response that the service provides aims to save lives, homes, buildings businesses and infrastructure. We are an intrinsic part not just of national resilience but the security and protection of the nation."

Government view

The government argues that the fire and rescue service has been "distracted" from a primary focus on local communities by the previous government's management from the centre and agenda to regionalise the service.

Bob Neill, the fire minister, said that "ending the culture of top-down Whitehall management of the fire and rescue service and restoring a focus on communities and local accountability, rather than targets, is at the heart of the government's approach".

However, he promised to "barrier bust" where fire and rescue authorities find "unnecessary restrictions are stopping them from getting on with things that clearly make sense".

The government's response consists largely on an "ideas bank", which it wants chief officers to cherry-pick without micro-management by central government.



Voluntarism, good neighbourliness and a desire to perform "public service" have a limited place in the fire and rescue service on safety grounds



The FBU believes response to the Fi is heading in the

does future or the and cue vice?

**the government's
Fire Futures project
is wrong direction**

Localism vs national resilience

The FBU is concerned that the government wants the service to opt for a localised model, without providing any evidence that such a model is available, or that it can meet the statutory requirements of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 or other legal obligations. The union is not convinced that the case for a purely localist, non-centralised fire and rescue service has been made. The FBU believes the government has failed to assess national risks that have a low impact locally, but high impact nationally – such as the recent M1 fire.

The fire and rescue service is, and must remain, a national service and resource, organised locally. Local “self-determination” for the fire and rescue service is no more attractive, or in the interest of the safety of citizens or the security of the nation, than would be the case if the various locally based battalions were to be given autonomy from the British army and the Ministry of Defence and made reliant upon voluntary protocols for collaborative working.

'Voluntarism'

One of the government's ideas is for “districts and boroughs to form their own fire and rescue authorities” (A.65). The FBU believes that there is little evidence of public appetite for taking on roles and functions currently provided by the state. This may well be because working people of all classes, performing the longest working hours in Europe, feel they do not have the time to do so.

The government says it wants more volunteers for the service, as part of its “Big Society”. But voluntarism, good neighbourliness and a desire to perform “public service” have a limited place in the fire and rescue service on safety grounds.

Denmark fire service – not our model

The national interests report commends the proposal to decouple commissioning from delivery and cites Denmark as a model to be copied.

Apart from the fact that the demographics of Denmark are more starkly polarised than in the UK, Denmark is not a model that the FBU believes has any useful lessons for the UK.

The report suggests that Denmark offers a more cost-effective service that still delivers in terms of reducing fire deaths.

The report points to *World Fire Statistics* (October 2010)

as the source. It is instructive to read in the same document how the Danish approach has affected the effectiveness of its fire and rescue service.

The statistics for fire deaths show that in Denmark there are 1.38 deaths per 100,000 persons, compared to the UK figure, which is 0.82 per 100,000 persons.

This means that in the country where commissioning and delivery of fire and rescue services have already been separated, you are more likely to die in a fire than you are in the UK.

We reject totally the privatisation of the fire and rescue service. The service is an emergency responder. There is no public demand for such a change.

No to privatisation

The government suggests that fire and rescue authorities should be required to consider commissioning their fire and rescue service from other providers (A.18).

The FBU believes these proposals are incoherent and do not provide resilience. The union totally rejects any suggestion that

fire authorities, in any guise, should become a commissioning agent, with fire services being delivered by another provider. We reject totally the privatisation of the fire and rescue service. The fire and rescue service is an emergency responder. There is no public demand for such a change, it is desired only by those commercial entities which wish to make a profit at public expense or those who wish to work in the interests of those commercial entities. The significant example of AssetCo shows where this can end up.

The FBU is absolutely clear. There is no place for the private sector and the profit motive in the fire service as a whole, including the area of training and specifically in the Fire Service College.

National pay and conditions

Another suggestion from the “ideas bank” is to change the current National Joint Council (NJC) mechanism. The FBU does not recognise any cogent argument that the NJC

The FBU does not believe that mutuals would provide more retained firefighters

mechanism is unfit for purpose or in need of adaptation.

The union has also found much confused thinking on this matter.

Where local flexibility on pay has been given free rein, it has led to a rapid growth of staff costs, with rewards going mainly to senior brigade managers. Variations in pay at firefighter, lower manager and middle

manager level will result in an exodus from low-paying brigades to higher-paying brigades, creating retention and recruitment problems. Recruitment costs and initial training costs are high. The Home Counties have seen this with the magnet of the London weighting allowance.

Andy Dark said: “Our members, the nation’s firefighters, are not well paid, especially when considering the long hours, stress and the risks they face, alongside the skills sets and performance asked of them.

“Firefighters ask for nothing more than a fair deal and to not be treated as some kind of office dogsbody. Firefighters are can-do and will-do people. They need to be respected and rewarded accordingly.”



Fire Futures reports and the government's responses are on the CLG website: www.communities.gov.uk/fire/firerescueservice/firefutures

Mutuals are not a realistic option

The government’s response to the *Fire Futures* reports suggests the “development of mutuals as an option for the fire and rescue service”. (A.17).

The Cabinet Office’s *Mutual Benefit* paper (April 2010) states: “Mutual organisations are either owned by and run in the interests of existing members, as is the case in building societies, co-operatives and friendly societies, or – as in many public services – owned on behalf of the wider community and run in the interests of the wider community, for example, NHS foundation trusts and co-operative trust schools.”

The TUC’s report on *Civil Society and Public Services* (March 2011) distinguishes between two types of mutuals. The first type is organisations that do not have external shareholders and are owned by, and for the benefit of, their membership. The second

type of mutual exists for the benefit of a defined community. Unlike shares in a company, membership of the new mutual organisation gives each member one vote only, and it gives no right to a share in the underlying value of the business. The member has no entitlement to a dividend. Instead, the surplus (profit) generated from the trading activity is returned to the community.

Ian Hayton, chief fire officer of Cleveland fire and rescue service, has stated publicly that he has received the go-ahead from the government to work up proposals for a mutual (*Guardian* 19 April) and has created a “trading arm” to attract “alternative” funding and claims to be close to announcing a “very large” contract to deliver risk management services to a local industry.

Despite claims in the article that there was

a “real buzz about the place” because of the proposal, firefighters on the ground share none of senior management’s enthusiasm for the project and have already expressed concerns to local FBU officials.

The FBU does not believe that mutuals are a credible model, nor does it believe that they would herald a bloom in civic pride, providing more retained firefighters who, in addition to holding down their primary employment and providing retained cover, would then have to take on the burden of the work, responsibility and legal liabilities of running “their” own fire station.

As the primary trade union of choice for the majority of retained and wholetime firefighters, the FBU see no appetite for such change. The skill sets required are too remote for non-fire service employees in the local communities to contemplate.



FACUNDO ARRIZABALAGA



Coroner praises firefighters in 7/7 inquest

**FBU believes lessons still
need to be learned from
terrorist bombings**

The Fire Brigades Union welcomed the coroner's report into the 7/7 bombing for its clear findings and the way it dealt with media myths about safety procedures.

The union also welcomed the praise for individual members of the public and fire crews and other emergency services in the report, published on 6 May.

FBU general secretary Matt Wrack said: "We agree with the coroner's conclusion about the contribution of firefighters and other emergency service workers. We are justifiably proud of the role firefighters played on that terrible day.

"In the immediate aftermath it took some time to establish these were co-ordinated bombings with the possibility of more primary attacks and secondary devices. Terrorist attacks don't come with a note explaining what they have done, what they have exploded or what is going to happen next."

Praise

The coroner, Lady Justice Hallett, specifically commended firefighters for improvising rescues. In a comprehensive report on the emergency response, she said: "I heard graphic evidence of how emergency personnel, in particular the firefighters, used boards, blankets, sheets and even pieces of metal to carry the injured and the dying. This was an incredibly difficult task given the treacherous



FIREFIGHTERS COMMENDED

"At each and every scene ordinary men and women, whether victims of the attack, passers-by or those acting in the course of their professional duties, reacted with extraordinary courage, composure and compassion. The demands upon the emergency responders were great and, regardless of their experience, whether probationers or seasoned professionals, whether firefighters, paramedics, or policemen, off duty or on, all were equal to the task."

nature of the devastated carriages, the conditions underfoot in the tunnels, and the steepness of the escalators and stairs.

"Each organisation should be proud of their employees who, when presented with an uncertain, complex and traumatic set of circumstances, did all that they could to ensure that lives were saved."

The 7 July 2005 bombings in London killed 52 people. However, the coroner came to the conclusion that "on the balance of probabilities each of the deceased would have died whatever time the emergency services had reached and rescued them".

Safety myths busted

The FBU welcomed the coroner's view that there should be no criticism of employees adhering to safety policies and protocols and highlighting the invaluable role of health and safety legislation. The coroner cleared up the confusion over firefighters not going into tunnels with live rails.

Matt Wrack said: "The criticism of individual fire crews from some quarters and reported in the media was very unfair. Rescuers can't rescue if they are themselves dead or injured, it adds to the problem and makes things worse.

"Their job is to carry out rescues as safely as possible in inherently dangerous situations so they can keep operational. Dead or injured fire crews can't help anyone."

"The risk to fire crews in the aftermath of co-ordinated terror attacks is not some theoretical risk. Over 340 US firefighters died in 9/11 – one in ten of all the deaths that day."

The report dealt specifically with the circumstances at Aldgate station, where a British transport police officer stood on a live rail urging firefighters to get onto the tracks.

Hallett said: "In any event, the firefighters' response would have been understandable. They knew what the brave inspector and many of us did not know: namely that lines can re-energise.

"Sections can be unexpectedly re-energised either be trains passing over them, or by poorly placed short-circuiting devices. There is accordingly no margin for error."

She stated that "neither the London Fire Brigade nor its employees should be unfairly criticised for adhering to policies and protocols", adding that health and safety legislation has played an "invaluable role" in protecting workers from injury, disease and death and "should not be forgotten".

Lessons

The FBU believes that some lessons still need to be learned after the inquest. The union has challenged the government to explain how emergency services across the UK could respond better in future to labour-intensive incidents with far fewer personnel and resources.

The union backed calls for better training, arguing that it was inexplicable why key recommendations regarding inter-emergency service working and radios working underground had not been implemented following the King's Cross fire in 1987.

Matt Wrack said: "The fire service is big enough to know it must learn lessons from this tragedy. The government must explain how emergency services across the UK will deal with very labour-intensive incidents in future with fewer people and resources.

"While, on this occasion, delays may not have altered the tragic outcome, we need to ensure the fire service plans adequately for a rapid and full response to all emergencies. Firefighters have been highlighting the danger of slower emergency responses for the past four years."

 The coroner's final report can be downloaded from the inquest website <http://7julyinquests.independent.gov.uk/docs/orders/rule43-report.pdf>



Health and safety

Engineering out the 'human factor' in major accidents

**Union
supports
HSE's
role**

FBU region 11 executive member Jim Parrott looks at the pressures on safety

Fire and rescue authorities have to deliver services that are effective, efficient, safe and fair. They also have to be open, honest and transparent if they are to hold management to account.

We need to examine what some see as the conflicting need to provide an essential service and the need to provide safe systems of work within an extremely hazardous industry.

In a recent interview, Strathclyde chief fire officer Brian Sweeney said: "The introduction of the Corporate Homicide Act and its application to senior officers and middle ranking and junior officers creates an environment where our ability to improvise is compromised, where there is a real fear, a culture of fear about potential prosecution and litigation and it definitely creates the environment within which firefighters are concerned that if they do risk their lives or if officers risk the lives of firefighters that they will find themselves in court being prosecuted for that very act."

7/7 attacks

So, does health and safety law prevent firefighters from saving lives, property and the environment? The coroner's report into the 7/7 London bombings, published in May, offers an insight into this dilemma.

In her report, Justice Hallett wrote: "Any employer, let alone an employer which regularly sends its employees into dangerous situations, has clearly defined duties in law. The (London Fire Brigade) LFB must take care to keep its firefighters reasonably safe, balancing properly the interests of its crews with the interests of those who require rescuing. The LFB would be in breach of its duty, for example, if having discovered the dangers of deploying a two-person crew in breathing apparatus it failed to provide a protocol to ensure proper back up. Arguably, the LFB would be failing in its duty if it failed to train its officers in risk assessment or its firefighters to follow orders. *If a fire officer allowed individual firefighters to follow their instincts and rush into a dangerous*

situation, ill-prepared and ill-equipped without proper back up, and lives were saved, no public criticism would follow. However, if the officer did the same and someone died, the officer or their organisation could find themselves in the dock facing criminal charges or in a civil court facing a claim for damages. As one LFB witness put it rather ruefully: "It all depends on the result."

The key lies in the highlighted sentence. To comply with health, safety and welfare law and national service agreements, fire and rescue services must have an effective health and safety management system to implement their health and safety policy, which is proportionate to the hazards and risks. Fire and rescue services need to manage all foreseeable risk effectively and to review their operational procedures in the light of experience.

Heroic acts

In response to the debate over "heroic acts" by individual

firefighters, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) published a policy statement in March in an effort to clarify the need to protect firefighters while ensuring they can respond effectively to emergencies. It was endorsed by the Fire Brigades Union, the Chief Fire Officers Association, the government's chief fire and rescue adviser and his Scottish and Welsh counterparts.

The HSE recognises that firefighting as an extremely hazardous industry. It has undertaken comprehensive research in other hazardous industries such as railways and industries falling within the major hazards COMAH regulations 1999.

This research established human error as the significant factor in major accidents. This led to the HSE publishing a series of guidance to engineer out human error under the title "human factors". The fire and rescue service should follow this approach in order to engineer out human factors.



Memorial to the victims of the 7/7 bombs in London

Legal Beagle

Don't get entangled in social networks



Q Are there legal issues for members who post on social networking sites about workplace matters?

A Much depends on the nature of the material that is posted.

If employees publish in a public forum comments that may be defamatory of their employer or are likely to destroy the relationship of trust and confidence between the employer and employee, then the employee may be disciplined and possibly dismissed and defamation proceedings could follow.

Employees who post such comments under a pseudonym will not be able to protect their identities. Employers will usually be able to obtain an order for disclosure from the host website of the identity of the poster.

As well as the issues of trust and defamation, employees also have implied contractual duties of confidentiality to their employer. Any information they post on a public forum about their employer could give rise to a breach of these duties. Such a breach could lead to discipline and even dismissal.

However, there is a distinction between material that is untrue, defamatory or intended to disparage the employer, and opinions that the employer simply does not like.

If a post is not actually damaging to the employer in any way, then it is unlikely that the relationship of trust and confidence will be so seriously undermined as to

allow the employer to dismiss a member.

They may, however, be able to treat the comments as misconduct and be able to take disciplinary procedures. How employers respond in such circumstances will probably depend on whether the behaviour is covered by their disciplinary procedure and their electronic communications policy.

Where disciplinary action does lead to a dismissal, fairness under S.98(4) of the Employment Relations Act could be considered in terms of the employee's right to freedom of expression under Article 10 European Convention on Human Rights. This arguably includes the right of an employee to complain publicly about their working conditions, though not to express damaging or libellous statements.

Q Can employers monitor what employees write on social networking sites rather than simply restricting them?

A Employers may monitor what happens at work, including individuals' use of the internet, but only if the workforce is clearly notified in advance of what activities are being monitored and the extent of that monitoring.

What is being monitored should be included in the

not breach employer rules or policies regarding the use of email or the internet.

But it still does not allow employers to monitor staff covertly without notifying the workforce.

Q Can employers stop workers writing blogs or using social networking websites at work and can they discipline workers for doing so?

A Employers are entitled to prevent or restrict employees using office equipment and internet connections for personal communications. Ideally, this will be by way of a clear policy on email and internet use, agreed with the employees' union, which makes it clear to employees what they can and cannot do (including social networking and blogging) and the sanctions for breaching the policy.

Employers should also be aware of the sanctions for disclosing confidential information about their employer.

However, keeping tabs on everything employees are writing online may be a huge and difficult task.

Reg 3(1)(a)(iv) of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 allows the monitoring of individuals without consent in order to investigate or detect the unauthorised use of a private telecommunications system. This could include monitoring to ensure that employees do



SATOSHI KAMBAYASHI

“It’s a fabulous game no matter what level you play”

Ilkeston station commander Gary Platts suggests he is on the brink of retiring from playing the game he loves – but don’t bank on it

Rugby

Quitting for good is something committed rugby players in their later years just keep on postponing, even though sports injuries tend to last longer, as station commander Gary Platts, now 48, knows all too well. He’s been injured out of the game three times in as many years. Giving it up for good may seem to make sense, but it’s just not that easy.

There is another reason why he hasn’t packed it in yet. “I’ve got this dread of going to Tesco – other supermarkets are available – on a Saturday afternoon,” says Gary, who is far from alone among rugby players of a certain age in having an unshakable belief that their rightful place on a Saturday afternoon is on the rugby pitch, not out shopping.

Latecomer

Gary came late to rugby. He didn’t take up the game until he joined Derbyshire fire and rescue service 17 years ago. A fire service colleague and good friend, Bob Curry, took him along to play at Tupton rugby union club, a “park side” team in a village outside Chesterfield. Gary had found his perfect team sport. There was no going back.

“It’s a fabulous game no matter what level or

standard you play,” he says. “I’ve played football, volleyball and many other team sports, but rugby beats them all. It’s a cracking sport.”

The rugby union rulebook begins by talking about passion, solidarity, integrity, discipline, team work, and the respect for the game and each other. There are, he says, many similarities between the qualities required on and off the rugby pitch and the qualities essential for the fire service – it’s all about trust.

Referee

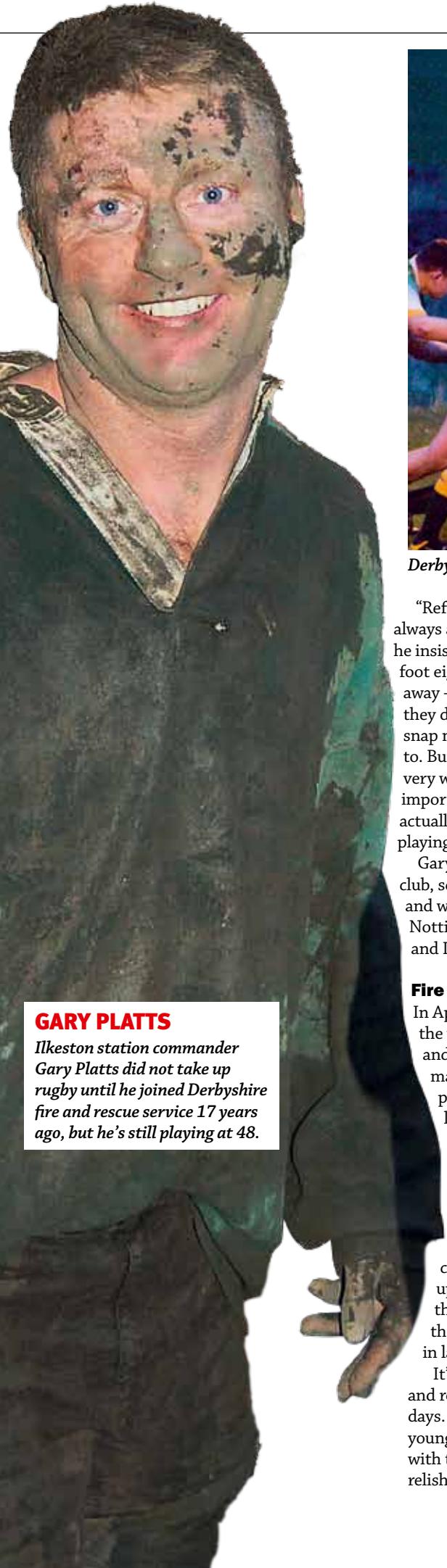
Gary has insider knowledge. He is now a qualified referee. “I started refereeing because I was getting injured – a broken elbow and a severed tendon in my finger. The older you are the longer it takes to recover.” Qualifying as a referee was one way of ensuring he doesn’t sever links with the game he loves when his playing days are finally over.

For the uninitiated, admonishing huge burly prop forwards or nimble wingers sounds rather terrifying – especially if they could be on the brink of handbagging another player or challenging the ref’s decision. But, Gary insists, refereeing in rugby is remarkably civilised – especially when compared to the tantrums and abuse that too often characterise football matches in parks or screened on TV.



Fire and rescue service rugby: Derbyshire vs West Midlands in 2007





GARY PLATTS

Ilkeston station commander Gary Platts did not take up rugby until he joined Derbyshire fire and rescue service 17 years ago, but he's still playing at 48.



Derbyshire fire and rescue team take on Buxton 2nds in April this year

"Refereeing rugby matches is always a satisfying experience," he insists. "I've told 25-stone, six foot eight men to 'shut up and go away' – I'm not interested'. And they do. In reality they could snap me in half if they wanted to. But rugby players are usually very well disciplined." It's so important that referees "can actually punish people for not playing in the spirit of the game".

Gary referees for his own club, schools, youth/colt teams and within the league across Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and Lincolnshire.

Fire service team

In April, Gary was playing for the victorious Derbyshire fire and rescue service team cup match against Buxton. "I'll probably make that my last game – but I've said that before," Gary says, not exactly committing himself either way.

It was the Derbyshire fire and rescue service's side's first game in a couple of seasons. Buoyed up by the bank holiday win, the team is gearing up for the new season which starts in late August.

It's not just about playing and refereeing, for Gary these days. He has taken up coaching young players – a connection with the game he is obviously relishing. It gives him a chance

I've told 25-stone, six foot eight men to 'shut up and go away – I'm not interested'. And they do.

to pass on his skills, knowledge and enthusiasm for the sport to the rising generation.

He's keen to spread the word that rugby has a lot to offer when it comes to teamwork, self-discipline and, of course, fitness. While football may be the national sport, rugby has a lot to offer and often doesn't get the same high profile, he believes. "Rugby undersells itself. I'm always trying to persuade footballers and other sports players to give it a try."

Gary is intent on doing what he can to encourage young people to get involved and see what the sport has to offer. He coaches Tupton Warriors – a team of under tens (minis) that includes his nine-year-old son Caleb, who seems to have taken to the game, filling Gary with immense fatherly pride.

Children can start playing non-contact "tag" rugby at six, and contact sport at under nine. At Tupton Warriors, as at any other club, it's essential that dads and mums are involved in every aspect of the game.

So, for Gary, there will be rugby life after playing – coaching and refereeing bringing their own satisfactions. But we'll have to wait until the next season starts to see whether he is bluffing about finally hanging up his playing boots and never again getting stuck in again at the bottom of a ruck!

Prize quiz

WIN!



Win a Kindle 3G

To win a Kindle wireless 3G device please send your answers to the Prize Quiz by 31 July 2011 on a postcard to: Prize Competition (June/July 2011) FBU Head Office, Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey KT2 7AE. Please include your name, address and membership number. The winner will be selected at random from all correct entries.

1 In the Bourne films, Jason Bourne is suffering from what?

- A** Agoraphobia
- B** Amnesia
- C** Anaphylactic shock
- D** Anorexia

2 Of the following, who is not a love interest of Austin Powers?

- A** Vanessa Kensington
- B** Foxy Cleopatra
- C** Diana Rigg
- D** Felicity

3 Before he was James Bond, Sean Connery worked as a ...?

- A** Tinker
- B** Tailor
- C** Soldier
- D** Milkman



S&G BARRATTS/PA PHOTOS

4 In the original series of *Mission: Impossible*, what traditionally self destructs after five seconds?

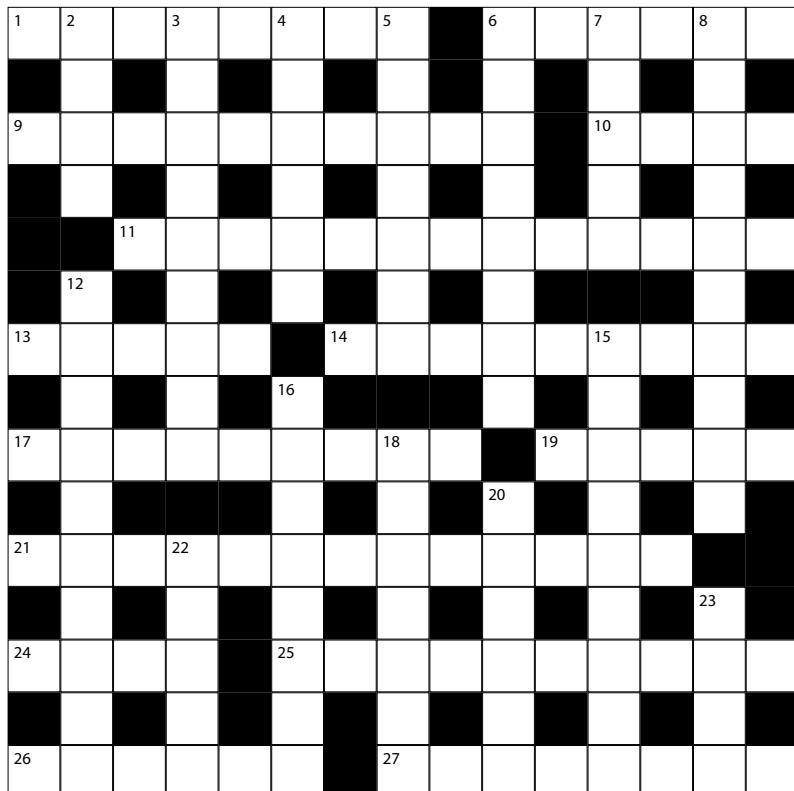
- A** Tape recorder
- B** Mobile phone
- C** Briefcase
- D** Laptop

5 Who played Steed in the 1998 remake of *the Avengers*?

- A** Ralph Fiennes
- B** George Clooney
- C** Brad Pitt
- D** Edward Fox



AP/PA PHOTOS



CROSSWORD

ACROSS

- 1** Virus resistant to drugs (8)
- 6** "No ifs, no buts, no public sector cuts," for example (6)
- 9** Over and over again (10)
- 10** Burn design on metal, glass etc with acid (4)
- 11** Spontaneously, involuntarily, in a self-acting way (13)
- 13, 20** Vindicated Merseyside firefighter (5,6)
- 14** Enemy (9)
- 17** No laughing matter if you bang this! (5-4)
- 19** City in Australia or Scotland (5)
- 21** Prominently; ostentatiously; noticeably (13)
- 24** TV station (4)
- 25** Newspaper in Eire (5,5)
- 26** Behind, in a nautical way (6)
- 27** Secret (4-4)

Last month's answers and winners



Crossword solution May

May quiz answers

- 1.** B – Wimbledon
- 2.** C – 1839
- 3.** B – Notting Hill Carnival
- 4.** D – Edinburgh
- 5.** A – Summer solstice

Winner of the April quiz
Andrew Fraser, Portsmouth

Station Cat

Money, money, money – it's a rich man's world

Essex not the only way – County CFO David Johnson is alleged to have spent £20,000 of taxpayers' money on moving to a new home outside the county



For richer, for poorer

AssetCo, the company which owns and maintains all London's and Lincolnshire's fire engines, is still in deep, deep trouble – and the threat that the fire engines will become the property of the company's creditors is still there.

It won't be wound up just yet – a winding-up petition was lifted on 27 April, after the company had taken its chief executive to court to force him to agree to a desperate last-minute deal that provided some operating capital. The court was told that "the new management team was determined to ensure full process and investigation of these calls for payment," so "the matter was adjourned for fuller determination".

But after scrabbling about for money, it needed a share price boost – and it didn't get one. The share price is bumping along the bottom at under 10p, its lowest ever and a fraction of what it once was, which shows little confidence.

And, curiously, one Sir David Howard, former Lord Mayor of London and stockbroker, recently increased his stake, presumably to take advantage of the very low share price.

If by some chance the company does recover, it will make Sir David, who is already worth £50 million, a much richer man. If it doesn't, the main losers will be the firefighters of London and Lincolnshire and the communities they serve.

You can keep in touch

with events on investigative journalist David Hencke's blog at <http://davidhencke.wordpress.com>.

Patterns of behaviour

Poor old Brian Coleman just can't help making an ass of himself. When the long-debated agreement on new shift patterns took effect, the London Fire Brigade put out a reasonable and dignified statement and, in the same spirit, the FBU decided not to say anything. All was well until London Broadcasting asked the chair of the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority, otherwise known as Rentamouth, for an interview.

LBC journalists know that poor, publicity-hungry Rentamouth will say anything, however foolish and irresponsible. Coleman talked of how he was "gloating" about his "victory" over London's firefighters, claiming they had achieved nothing.

London FBU executive member Ian Leahair was forced to go on the radio and explain that while the LFB had wanted 12-hour day shifts and 12-hour night shifts, what they now had was 10.5-hour day shifts and 13.5-hour nights.

How the other half live – part 1

Peter Holland, chief fire officer of Lancashire, retired and then came back



to work at half his usual salary. The poor man now has to get by on just £75,000 a year – plus his pension, of course. Trouble is, these high salaries at the top are wonderful ammunition for the enemies of public sector workers, like the so-called TaxPayers' Alliance, which is trying to pretend that every public sector worker gets the sort of money Mr Holland rakes in.

How the other half live – part 2

Essex Conservative councillor Russell Quirk used a freedom of information request to find out what the top brass were spending on their Essex fire and rescue service credit cards. It turns out they do themselves pretty well for people who are aiming to save £10 million from the budget with cuts which will affect 11 fire stations and halve the number of fulltime firefighters in Brentwood.

Chief fire officer David Johnson is alleged to have spent £20,000 of taxpayers' money on moving out of the county. He receives a £148,633 salary and £31,656 pension contribution each year and is alleged to have claimed £3,704.60 towards new carpets, £3,466.93 for floor tiles and £324 for Laura Ashley curtains. He also claimed £8,250.77 in expenses since 2008, while seven senior managers put in claims of £46,000 in two years.

Pick on someone your own size

Then there's the story behind the story. More than 40 Essex firefighters were

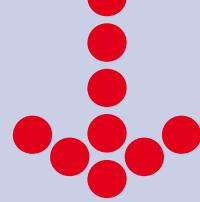
disciplined and threatened with defamation proceedings for raising privately with local politicians their concerns about these aspects of spending. Then came Councillor Quirk, closely followed by the *Daily Mail*. If the firefighters' private comments, which were never intended for public consumption, were deemed defamatory, will the fire and rescue service take legal action against the *Daily Mail* and councillor Quirk? Probably not.

Remembering with Marx

There's always a decent saucer of cream at the Marx Memorial Library, a charming period house in Clerkenwell, on the edge of the city of London.

That's where Station Cat went the other day, for the opening of an exhibition recalling the great Wapping dispute, when Rupert Murdoch moved all his newspapers to Wapping overnight and, after a long battle, broke the power of the unions in the newspaper industry. There your cat purred up into the tanned and elegant Tony Dubbins, who in 1986 was the general secretary of the National Graphical Association, and asked him about the story that he once sent for Labour's shadow trade and industry secretary, Tony Blair, and berated him furiously for failing to support the unions. "I can't comment on the story that I threatened to throw Blair out of my office window," he said, and smiled a sort of secretive little smile, as though at some pleasant memory.

25-year badges



FBU regional offices



Dave Browning (l), HQ, and his brother Graeme Browning, red watch, Whitstable (r) receive their 25-year badges from officers branch secretary Sarah Richards



FF John Durston (l), blue watch, Darlington, receives his 25-year badge from branch rep Paul Dawson



Paul Liiv (l), fire safety, Mid and West Wales, receives his 25-year badge from region 8 officers rep Rob Martin



Martin Hares (r), white watch, Poplar, London, receives his 25-year badge from branch secretary Steve White with white watch looking on



Kent brigade secretary Mark Simmons presents 25-year badges to (l to r) **Ian Meyers, Joe Iatty, Nigel Woodward and Kevin Sherman**



John Bamsey (r), Morriston, Swansea, receives his 25-year badge from region 8 officers rep Rob Martin



Chris Harrison (l), Lincolnshire, receives his 25-year badge from officers section chair Tim Joyce



Dai Phillips (l) business fire safety, Mid and West Wales, receives his 25-year badge from region 8 officers rep Rob Martin



Peter Hughes (r), white watch, Poplar, London, receives his 25-year badge from branch secretary Steve White (l) with white watch looking on



David Middlemiss (centre), green watch, McDonald Road, Lothian and Borders, receives his 25-year badge from membership secretary Bob Thomson (centre l). Looking on: Back row (l-r) Tony Duncan, Steven Latimer, Fraser Monaghan. Front Row (l-r) Craig Wilson, Calum Murray.

Please send photographic prints or digital picture files to: Firefighter, FBU, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, KT2 7AE or firefighter@fbu.org.uk

Please include **full details** for every picture – full names of everyone who is in it; their station/brigade/watch etc; where they are in the picture (eg: left to right); their union posts/branch if relevant; and where and when it was taken.

REGION 1 Scotland

52 St Enoch Square, Glasgow, Scotland G1 4AA
0141 221 2309, 01rs@fbu.org.uk

REGION 2 Northern Ireland

14 Bachelors Walk, Lisburn, Co Antrim, BT28 1XJ
02892 664622, 02rs@fbu.org.uk

REGION 3 Cleveland, Durham, Northumberland, Tyne & Wear

1 Carlton Court, 5th Avenue, Team Valley, Gateshead, NE11 0AZ
0191 487 4142, 03rs@fbu.org.uk

REGION 4 Yorks and Humber

9 Marsh Street, Rothwell, Leeds, LS26 0AG
0113 288 7000, 04rs@fbu.org.uk

REGION 5 Greater Manchester, Lancs, Isle of Man, Cumbria, Merseyside, Cheshire

The Lighthouse, Lower Mersey St, Ellesmere Port, Cheshire, CH65 2AL
0151 357 4400, 05rs@fbu.org.uk

REGION 6 Derby, Notts, Lincs, Leics, Northants

Little Dennis Street South (above Dawsons), Nottingham NG2 4EU
0115 947 2042, 06gn@fbu.org.uk

REGION 7 West Mids, Staffs, Warks, Hereford & Worcester, Salop

195/7 Halesowen Rd, Old Hill, West Midlands, B64 6HE
01384 413633, 07rs@fbu.org.uk

REGION 8 Mid and West Wales, North Wales, South Wales

4 Ffordd yr Hen Gae, Pencoed, Bridgend, CF35 5LJ
01656 867910, 08rs@fbu.org.uk

REGION 9 Herts, Beds, Cambs, Essex, Norfolk, Suffolk

28 Atlantic Square, Station Road, Witham, Essex, CM8 2TL
01376 521521, 09rs@fbu.org.uk

REGION 10 London

John Horner Mews, Frome Street, Islington, London, N1 8PB
020 7359 3638, london@fbu.org.uk

REGION 11 Kent, Surrey, Sussex

Unit 11, Hunns Mere Way, Woodingdean, Brighton, BN2 6AH
01273 309762, 11rs@fbu.org.uk

REGION 12 Bucks, Berks, Hants, Oxon, Isle of Wight

FBU Regional Office, The Merlin Centre, Unit L, Gatehouse Close, Aylesbury HP19 8DP
01296 482297, 12rs@fbu.org.uk

REGION 13 Cornwall, Devon and Somerset, Avon, Gloucs, Wilts, Dorset

158 Muller Road, Horfield, Bristol, BS7 9RE
0117 935 5132, 13rs@fbu.org.uk

Change of address or next of kin

Advise your Brigade Membership Secretary or any change of address and Head Office of changes to next of kin or nominations for benefits.

FBU FREEPHONE LEGAL ADVICE LINE 0808 100 6061

The line provides advice for personal injury, family law, wills, conveyancing, personal finance and consumer issues.

For disciplinary and employment-related queries contact your local FBU representative.